

Dear Friends:

I salute the students, educators, parents, and everyone else across South Carolina who played a part in moving public school reform forward in 2007. Please join me in recalling the Top 10 significant public school stories and events of the past year.

No. 10: Anne Marie Taylor named Teacher of the Year, launches her own blog

Anne Marie Taylor from Pine Tree Elementary School in Kershaw County became the first State Teacher of the Year to record her experiences on a blog. The special education teacher talked about the passionate educators and inspiring students she meets as she traveled across South Carolina.

No. 9: National Board certified teachers among the tops in the nation

An additional 655 South Carolina teachers achieved National Board certification. The 2007 results brought the number of state teachers receiving the highest credential in teaching to 5,734, third highest in the nation and third in the total number of teachers who have achieved certification over time.

No. 8: South Carolina teachers take to the airwaves to make a difference

A new public-private partnership initiative was aimed at attracting talented people to the teaching profession. Three 30-second television commercials were a boost to our plan to improve the image of teaching and reward quality teaching.

No. 7: High school seniors earn \$685 million in college scholarships

South Carolina's high school Class of 2007 won a record \$685 million in college scholarships, the highest figure in six years of tracking these awards. The senior class total of \$685,620,339 was \$71 million more than the previous year, pushing the state's five-year scholarship amount to nearly \$2.8 billion.

No. 6: Student Loan Corporation gives \$3 million to help improve schools

The South Carolina Student Loan Corporation donated \$3 million to boost academic programs for the state's 16 Palmetto Priority Schools striving to meet student achievement goals. The donation funded a Star Academy at each school to work with overage students at risk of dropping out.

No. 5: School buses go green

The General Assembly approved a 15-year replacement cycle to add more new fuel-efficient vehicles to the state's oldest-in-the-nation school bus fleet. Rock Hill and Richland District 2 got South Carolina's first two electric/diesel hybrid school buses, putting the state among national leaders in curbing exhaust pollution harmful to children.

No. 4: Task force releases landmark plan for equitable, adequate school funding

A 40-member statewide panel proposed a new adequacy program that would include a new "poverty weighting" in statewide funding formulas, one that takes into account the higher costs associated with educating students who have special learning needs, who do

not speak English or who live in poverty. The task force said the state should provide a world-class education in all districts and for all children because “minimally adequate” is not an acceptable standard for South Carolina.

No. 3: Public school choice moves forward

Voucher proponent Gov. Mark Sanford vetoed a bill passed by bipartisan majorities in both the House and Senate that would have guaranteed students and parents more public school and curriculum choices. We continued to push ahead, however, creating a new Office of Public School Choice within the Education Department, holding the state’s first public school choice conference for educators, and backing a new choice bill for the 2008 legislative session. National news reports called South Carolina a leader in creating single-gender programs for students.

No. 2: PACT called "unsatisfactory," changes proposed

We unveiled a sweeping set of recommendations to unify state and federal school accountability systems, streamline services to struggling schools, reduce state standardized testing time and give more detailed test results to teachers. Part of our plan would replace Palmetto Achievement Challenge Tests with end-of-year accountability measures.

No. 1: Plans for public school reform announced

We were able to launch a five-point plan to improve, reform and support public schools. In more than a dozen town hall meetings across the state, I found South Carolinians eager to discuss the plan’s focus on accelerating innovation; reforming accountability; expanding public school choices; promoting fair and equitable school funding; and elevating and reinvigorating the teaching profession.

In this new year, I’m eager to begin working with the General Assembly to provide more choices within public education, improve accountability and testing, and begin to address fair, equitable, and adequate funding for every student in every community.

Sincerely,

Jim Rex
State Superintendent of Education